

Non-formal Theological Education: The Meserete Kristos Church Experience

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One of the greatest challenges before church leaders today is balanced church growth. Many churches are strong on one area but very weak in others. For example, many churches are very strong in evangelism but are weak in bringing the new believers into the church. Other churches are strong in worship but may be weak in teaching. There are also churches which do a great job in teaching their people, but they lack love, enthusiasm and warm fellowship.

But a truly healthy church will be growing in at least the following five ways:

1. People are being saved and are being added to the church.
2. New churches are being planted.
3. Christians are growing in their spiritual maturity.
4. The church is growing in its maturity and effectiveness.
5. There is vision and effort to reach other groups and other cultures.

The question of church growth is very important because it keeps the church itself from becoming impotent, bureaucratic, institutionally fossilized, and static.

In an impotent church, people are not growing in discipleship, the health of the church is poor, there is little effective outreach to the unchurched, and the vision of the Great Commission (Matt 28:19-20) is clouded.

The purpose of this paper is to examine and present the experience of Meserete Kristos Church's (MKC) teaching ministry specifically in the dimension of non-formal theological education and to show its ripple effect.

Background

The Meserete Kristos Church emerged out of the Mennonite Central Committee and Eastern Mennonite Mission work which began in Ethiopia in 1948. As such it is one of the oldest evangelical churches in Ethiopia.¹

The church, besides its spiritual ministry to its members and to the general public, also used to serve its communities in areas of education, health, agriculture, relief and development in collaboration with the overseas Mennonite agencies.

In 1982, due to the former Marxist military government's nationalization action

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against the church, MKC lost all its institutions including its office, worship buildings, and bank accounts as well as all physical properties. Officially it no longer existed. However, beginning July 1992, thanks to the democratization process initiated by the new government, MKC has been able to repossess seven of the church buildings. The office, guest house, book stores and all its school properties remain in the hands of the government to this day.

For almost ten years the church survived and prospered underground. The persecution was a blessing in disguise. During the underground life of the church, membership grew from 5,000 to 34,000. Fourteen congregations (local churches) multiplied to 53, while church-planting centers increased from three to 27, and the number of full-time workers rose from 12 to 98.

Today, six years later, those numbers have more than doubled again. Such tremendous growth posed serious challenges to the church leadership. As absolutely essential to accommodating and managing such growth, the leadership introduced three important changes. These are: a) training programs for selected trainers from the church-planting centers and local churches; b) restructuring of the church administration organogram. (See Appendix 1); and c) implementation of a pastoral care structure within the church-planting centers and local churches (see the structure on pages 29-30).

Considerable progress has been made to provide basic training for nurture, but much more has to be done. Up until this time, the MKC Head Office has adopted a four-pronged strategy which is underway. It includes:

1. A "Training of Trainers Program" in which 940 trainers from church-planting centers and local congregations are given regular structured non-formal training two times a year both at church-planting and regional centers. The total number of training centers for this purpose are 54. (See Tables 1 and 2 for the number of trainees of church-planting centers).

2. A "One Year for Christ" program, each year for 40 volunteers of young people who are given six weeks of formal teaching before being sent out on assignments of church-planting centers (see curriculum, Appendix 2, and details under III.B).

3. A Bible Institute which trains 17 evangelists on a one-year certificate level and three-year associate degree level in collaboration with Eastern Mennonite University of Harrisonburg, Virginia.²

4. A program of scholarship assistance that is currently training 14 leaders and trainers, besides those in the Bible institute, at home and abroad in various post high school diploma and degree programs.

In light of the explosive growth of the church and the resulting demand for leadership training on every level (non-formally or formally), there is an urgent need to continue training the lay leadership twice a year for a period of two to six days each, (two for church-planting training center trainers and five for local church trainers) so that they in turn can train others within their constituencies.

MKC has so far invested a lot in the lay leadership and the ripple effect has been tremendous. As a result, many churches have been planted and quite a number of

members have ended up becoming full-time workers in the local churches as well as in the church planting centers.

According to the figures in the table below, the growth in percentage between 1982 (banning of the church) and reopening 1992 is 85.3 percent. Growth rate in membership between 1994 and 1995 is ten percent while between 1995 and 1996 is 20 percent. The numerical growth of these two years, 1995 and 1996, is phenomenal. The average annual growth rate during the last 14 years is 9.5 percent.

Based on these statistics, the projection within the next five years is that the number of members will be more than 150,000, church-planting centers will number 300, local churches will number 250 and Regional Centers will number 25. (See maps, Appendix 3).

The following table (taken from *Annual Reports* of MKC Head Office) depicts the phenomenal growth of MKC:

S/N	Year	Members	Number of Church planting centers	Number of Local Churches	Center Regional	Growth Percent
1	1982	5,000	3	14	—	
2	1992	34,000	27	53	—	85.3
3	1994	75,724	340	110	7	18
4	1995	83,738	364	130	11	10
5	1996	104,440	296	172	15	20

MKC's non-formal theological education programs

MKC has two non-formal theological training programs developed during the last 14 years for the purpose of equipping and mobilizing members to evangelize others. These are the Training of the Trainers Program, and the One Year for Christ Program.

The Training of Trainers Program

This program has been a very useful tool for five important reasons: the existence of a clearly defined educational goal; the identification of a well established educational system; the introduction of a functional pastoral care ministry for the purpose of implementing the discipleship program within the structures of church-planting centers and local churches; the experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit; and the allocation of adequate budget.

MKC'S Educational Goal. Gangel points out to his readers that a church has to have a clear-cut educational goal. Without this there will be total chaos.³

From the outset, the leadership of MKC has clearly coined its educational theme based on the Apostle Paul's instruction to Timothy: "You then, my child, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus. And what you have heard from me through many witnesses *entrust to reliable men who will be able to teach others as well*" (my emphasis) (2 Tim 2:1-2). Thus, the main educational goal of MKC is to *equip members of the church for upright Christian living and ministry (service) so that they may build the church of Jesus Christ in Ethiopia and beyond*. (Eph. 4:11-16).

MKC Educational System. The educational system that is already in place for this purpose is as follows: the Education Committee of MKC (a group of seven) along with the Education Secretary and Teachers Council, all together 12 at the Head Office level, meet six times in a year. The Council selects relevant subjects most of the time dwelling on felt needs of the church. (See MKC organogram, Appendix 1). Once the selection is done, assignments are given to individuals or to a team of two or three members to prepare the teaching materials. Usually two materials are prepared at a time. Eventually, the council of twelve teachers breaks into two groups. Then the council comes together on a fixed date to go through the materials to edit theological and grammatical errors. In the process of editing a learning situation takes place. And later each Council member will be given a copy to make a self-study on the material. Meanwhile, the two materials will be typed and duplicated and kept until the next training program commences.

Usually in the first month of the Ethiopian New Year (September), the Education Committee fixes teaching months and dates and notifies the selected trainees of the local churches. On the date of the training program trainees will come to the strategically located centers from their local churches where the assigned teachers go, taking the prepared materials with them. The trainers make sure that they have with them enough copies and attendance sheets. The teaching program will then take place as scheduled.

With regard to trainees, selection is done upon the recommendation of the local churches and church-planting centers based on the selection criteria produced by the Education Committee. Some of the criteria are maturity in Christian life, Bible knowledge, ability to communicate the truth, preferably pedagogical exposure and teaching experience (Teachers' Training Institution graduates have this experience.)

This training program takes place twice a year for a period of six days. So far there are 20 selected centers and five more will be added in the 1996-97 fiscal year training period. Evaluation is done by giving written examinations to the trainees. The examination papers are corrected and grades are collected on a roster. At the end of the year, prizes are awarded to trainees who stand in the top three places. This exercise has encouraged and motivated them to study the materials they are given.

Fremont and Sara Regier in their Research Project on African Non-formal Theological Education Programs strongly note that students testify to the empowerment received through their TEE (Theological Education by Extension) in African countries.⁴ MKC trainees also witness that the training they are receiving has given them new insights and is providing them with sharp tools for ministry.

Table 1

Indicates the training centers, number of trainees of local churches and the medium of instruction:

S/N	Training Center	Number of Trainees	Medium of Instruction
1	Addis Ababa	42	Amharic
2	Nazareth	33	Amharic
3	Metehara	12	Amharic
4	Dire Dawa	23	Amharic
5	Agamssa	42	Oromifa
6*	Gelila	47	Oromifa
7*	Dengeb	43	”
8*	Meta Robi	33	“
9*	Nazareth	15	“
10*	Gindeberet	13	“
11*	Gimbi	13	“
12*	Nekempte	13	“
13*	Shambu	30	“
14*	Aje	10	“
15*	Adamitulu	12	“
16*	Meki	15	“
17*	Mojo	15	“
18*	Kone	13	“
19*	Uka	10	“
20*	Tiya	13	“
	Total number	447	

Table 2

The New Training Centers and number of trainees planned for February and July 1997 are the following.

S/N	Training Center	Number of Trainees	Medium of Instruction
1	Zewaye	20	Amharic
2	Shone	20	Amharic
3	Hossaena	20	Amharic
4	Bahir Dar	20	Amharic
5	Welliso	20	Amharic
	Total	100	

The grand total of Tables 1 and 2 is 547.

(All names of centers and figures are taken from The Education Department of MKC.)

Trainees of Centers 5*- 20* come from Oromo-speaking congregations. The Amharic materials are translated into Oromo language for training and teaching purposes as well.

The titles of training covered during the September 1996-July 1997 year as a sample are the following: I Corinthians (book study), Haggai (book study), the Cross, Worship. (For further information, see training areas covered within the last 13 years, Appendix 4).

As already indicated, those who have taken this training will go to their local churches and teach others so that they in turn can teach members within the structure of the pastoral care ministry.

The church-planting center trainers are also trained in the same pattern. Thus, 393 trainees attend 29 strategically located centers to get the two-day training, then return to train others. (See curriculum, Appendix 4).

Pastoral Care Ministry. The Pastoral Care Ministry has been patterned after the example set forth by Christ in his ministry on earth. Jesus was very much involved with his disciples in a “small group” setting, as well as being present ministering to the multitudes. Acts 2 describes a two-pronged pattern for believers, gathering in large-group meetings and in small cell groups.

Rather than competing, each format provided essential elements to the growth of the believers. The home cell group (care groups) provided nurturing (teaching), fellowship, prayer, and outreach opportunities.

In the New Testament we see that home gatherings were held at the homes of Priscilla and Aquila (Rom. 16), Nympha (Col. 4:15) and Philemon. These home

gatherings completed the meetings held in the temple and the synagogues, providing expression of church family life.

Historically, a reinstitution of the use of small groups has accompanied almost every recorded revival. Many say that John Wesley's eighteenth-century revival flourished because he organized the converts into groups of ten, each with its own leader. The famous "haystack prayer meetings" grew out of a group who met regularly to pray for the spiritual welfare of their fellow students. The meetings led to the first student missionary society in America which provided the main impulse for the foreign missionary movement of American churches.⁵

The Yoido Full Gospel Church of Seoul, Korea, led by David Yonggi Cho, has a similar experience of providing a pastoral care ministry to the members of the church. Pastor Cho started a home cell unit system for the purpose of nurture, prayer, and fellowship. Today, the church has more than 50,000 home cells⁶ and more than 700,000 members. This network is the mainstream for the life of the church.⁷

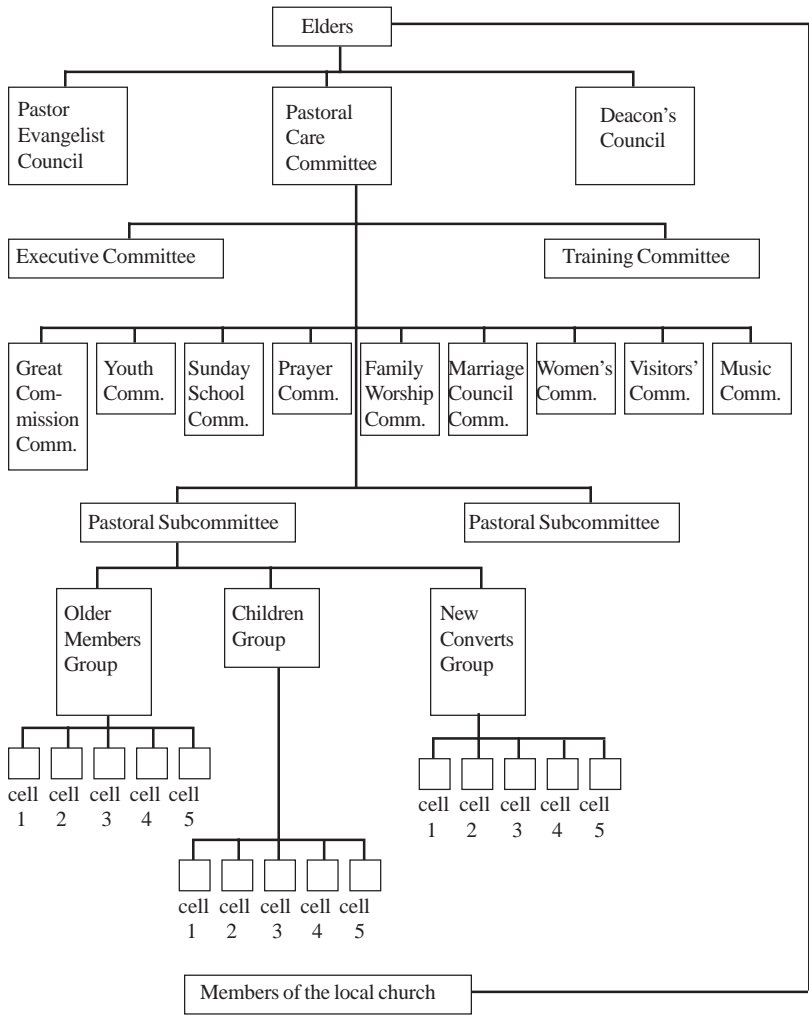
Meserete Kristos Church introduced pastoral care ministry in 1980 prior to its underground church life. Due to the severity of the persecution, a careful study of establishing a pastoral care ministry through home cell networks was necessitated. As a result, the ministry was refined and fully introduced into local church and church-planting center settings.

Included with the following summary of the functions of the pastoral care committee is a chart which represents the pastoral care structure of the local church. The chart shows a superimposed pastoral care structure, a practical tool for the discipleship training of members in cell groups.

Functions of the Pastoral Care Committee

1. Responsible to the elders.
2. Elected on the basis of their gifts by the elders.
3. Facilitate training programs (nurture) for members of different groups (older members, new converts, and children) through the pastoral sub-committee in their respective home-cell groups.
4. Coordinate the activities of different committees (Great Commission, Youth Committee, etc.) give periodic reports to elders.
5. Hear periodic reports from pastoral sub-committees and give general guidelines if needed.
6. Carry out additional duties assigned by elders

The Pastoral Care Structure of Local Church



Pastoral Sub-committee

1. Responsible to the pastoral-care committee.
2. Elected by the elders council on the basis of their gifts.
3. Keep records of members of its constituency (sex, age, date of new birth experience, date of water baptism, marital status, level of education, etc.)
4. Organize cell groups in accordance to their level of maturity together with necessary follow up.
5. Use the teaching materials prepared by the main education committee (at the head office level) indicated in the curriculum for different levels of maturity (see the curriculum, Appendix 4).
6. Evaluate the activities of home cell groups along with the cell group leaders.
7. Organize cell groups for new converts and follow through until baptism and into the next stage of training.
8. Carry out additional duties assigned by the pastoral care committee.

The experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Another factor which is responsible for the existence of a strong and ongoing discipleship program in MKC is the belief and experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit—the dynamite promise. This experience has birthed biblical power and biblical patterns. As a result, MKC church leaders teach members about the baptism of the Holy Spirit in the local church-planting centers, and members are observed to experience the dynamite power from the Holy Spirit according to Act 1:8.

The promise of power from God is that God will equip the saints based upon his authority to make disciples. God will equip members to do his work, be his regents and see his Kingdom built everywhere among tribes of Ethiopia and other nations as well (Matt 28:19-20, Luke 24:49). Accordingly, MKC's immediate and future goal is to reach the different tribes of Ethiopia and to go out to other nations of the world. Meanwhile, MKC also seeks to motivate and encourage Ethiopian Christians in the diaspora to reach peoples in the different cultures where they are currently living.

Budget Allocation. After having seen the ripple effect of the educational program of the head office of MKC, the leadership has been allocating an educational budget every year.

The following table shows the MKC head office budget allocation for nine sections and departments. (All figures taken from Annual Budget of MKC head office. Currency is in Ethiopian Birr [1 USD - 6.35 Birr]. *Includes literature, pension, and Regional Centers Coordination Department)

S/N	Budget fiscal year Eth.C.	Total budget for the year	Admin. Dept.	Educa-tion Dept.	Bible Inst.	Pastoral Care Dept.	Evang. and Church Dept.	Devel-opment Dept.	Other* Depts.
1	1985	529,000	147,739	86,253	—	92,930	156,887	15,992	29,199
2	1986	1,043,475	265,568	212,816	—	124,059	174,814	42,889	223,309
3	1987	1,308,322	254,855	336,141	—	191,787	251,301	65,796	226,442
4	1988	1,445,312	373,107	274,775	117,920	207,936	255,295	78,579	137,799
5	1989	1,592,713	358,073	404,309	156,335	191,445	160,567	67,335	254,649

The two departments that deal directly with non-formal training programs are the Education and Evangelism Church Planting Departments. Both have an average of 39.3 percent budget allocation when compared to other sections and departments. This shows that a high priority is given to non-formal training programs.

One Year for Christ non-formal training program

The One Year for Christ is a unique discipleship non-formal training program of MKC focused on bringing young adults into a more intimate relationship with Jesus Christ and equipping them to serve others and make disciples out in the church-planting centers. This program has strong similarities with Youth Evangelism Service (YES) program of Eastern Mennonite Mission of Salunga, Pennsylvania. The One Year for Christ program was started in the 1970s with the vision that young men after having two weeks of training would be placed in local churches without full-time workers.

Later, in the 1980s, the program was evaluated and the need for having young men in the field, especially in church-planting centers, was identified. Consequently the term of service was raised to one full year program and the training was also expanded from two weeks to six weeks. To this effect, a training curriculum was designed (See Appendix 2).

This exercise has brought about effective and encouraging results. Furthermore, the program has served as a screening test for those who would like to enter full-time ministry. So far, more than 200 young men have participated and 30 percent of them have ended up becoming full-time workers.

The following processes take place to recruit, equip and send young people to local churches and church planting centers:

1. Select 40 dedicated young men for the program based upon local church recommendations. (An interview is given to each candidate by the facilitators of the program.)
2. Identify and assign teachers to give the training (months of November and January).

3. Train for six weeks using the curriculum designed for the program at the MKC Bible Institute.
4. Issue pertinent handouts, books, and other materials for each course to the trainees.
5. Give evaluatory examinations at the end of each course.
6. Graduate the trainees upon successful completion.
7. Issue a certificate along with the transcript.
8. Assign to church-planting centers and local churches.
9. Supervise (oversee) the work through the personnel of the head office of the Evangelism and Church Planting Department.

Outstanding results of non-formal theological education

MKC has been experiencing growth in many aspects due to the implementation of a continuous and timely educational program all the way down the line of its church structure. The following are the indicators of growth in the local churches as well as in the church planting centers as observed in MKC's experience.

Spiritual growth

Progress in spiritual growth cannot be made without accompanying growth in the spiritual lives of members of the church. Although spiritual growth is more difficult to measure, there are many indications of this growth observable within the MKC.

One clear indication of spiritual growth is that the members have learned to pray with expectancy and love to pray. Prayer meetings are held in some local churches every morning and evening. There are prayer groups that meet in private homes. All-night prayer is also made every month in most local churches and church-planting centers. Furthermore, prayer is a prominent part of Sunday services and cell group meetings. People also come to church buildings during the day to pray. All of these prayers build up the members and their relationship with the Lord.

Prayers are often accompanied by fasting. The length varies depending on the nature of the issue to be prayed upon. Generally, there is a strong emphasis on prayer whether individually, corporately or in some type of small group setting.

The members in the church are also strongly disciplined in many areas of Christian life and ministry. As already indicated, the teaching materials used are the materials produced by the head office education committee. The teachers are those trained by the trainers who themselves got the training from the head office teaching team. In fact, local churches use curriculum designed by the pastoral committee of the head office and they know what to teach to the different groups they have in their churches.

Organic growth

Singletary points out that organic growth involves the leadership and shepherding network of a church. When defining organic growth he says that it pertains to the infrastructure or cellular growth within churches. It consists of all sorts of subgroups,

small groups, and networks so vital to the assimilation, nurture and mobilization of the membership.⁸

The experience of MKC fits Singletary's explanation. Due to the continuous process of discipleship activities, the church has a high level of lay mobilization, that is, a relatively small percentage of the membership are spectators. There is also numerical growth which in turn results in healthy mitosis (cell division) or reproduction of local churches, for example when a larger cell group breaks into four, as in the case of the Dire Dawa local church. (See case study A, below.) Furthermore, new areas are evangelized by the members and church-planting centers are eventually initiated.

Numerical Growth

Numerical growth, defined as a growth in the number of believers in the local churches, is one of the most important ways in which a church can grow. It is quite clear from the biblical point of view that God wants the church to grow numerically. God wants churches to make disciples of all nations (Matt 28:19) and is not willing that any should perish (2 Pet 3:9). An example of continually adding people to the church is clearly seen in early church history (Acts 2:47).

In the experience of the Meserete Kristos Church, numerical growth is quite evident due to its intensive educational program carried out within local churches and church planting centers, as noted in the following case studies.

The Nazareth Meserete Kristos Local Churches. The Nazareth Meserete Kristos churches are geographically located in Nazareth town, 100 kilometers southeast of Addis Ababa, the capital city of Ethiopia. This is the town where Eastern Mennonite Mission began its work. Prior to that, in 1948, Mennonite Relief Committee of Elkhart, Ind., sent workers to do relief and rehabilitation work.⁹ Up until 1982 there has been this local church whose membership was not more than 300.

The leadership using the training materials produced by the education committee of MKC continued to disciple the members. Eventually, the pastoral care ministry was introduced. Home cell groups were formed and the work continued up until 1992. Due to the numerical growth of the church, there was a need to divide the church into two local churches. In accordance with the Meserete Kristos Church Constitution, Article 5 number 2.*¹⁰ The necessary preparations were then made and in 1992, the local church was divided into two.

Two years later, due to the expansion of the work and numerical growth within the two local churches of Nazareth, they underwent a second division. As a result, they became four local churches. These churches are the Semen (North), Misrak (East), Debub (South) and Mierab (West) Nazareth Meserete Kristos Churches. The four churches are located in four different sections of the town, run and administered by their own elders. After restructuring themselves, they have their own pastors and evangelists, worship places, and home cell groups and still have an intact pastoral care ministry which caters to the nurture of their members. Furthermore, the four local churches of Nazareth have their own outreach centers where churches are

planted. According to the annual report of the Nazareth regional center of August 1996, the membership in the four local churches is: Semen - 1003, Misrak - 1021, Debub - 716 and Mierab - 722, totalling 3472. (See table below).

The following table shows the key factors that are responsible for growth in the case of Nazareth churches.

S/N	Various groups	Semen (North)	Misrak (East)	Debub (South)	Mierab (West)
1	Total Membership	1003	1021	726	722
2	No. of Pastoral Care Committees	1	1	1	1
	Total no. involved	9	9	10	1
3	No. of sub-pastoral committee group	2	2	2	2
	Total no. involved	18	18	12	12
4	No. of trainers cell group	12	10	7	7
	Total no. involved	173	158	140	111
5	No. of older church cell group	15	17	21	16
	Total no. involved	370	323	420	324
6	No. of new member cell group	10	8	9	7
	Total no. involved	358	133	133	100
7	No. of cell children's group	15	19	12	10
	Total no. involved	356	260	177	110
8	No. of cell prayer group	16	26	15	19
	Total no. involved	219	244	232	174
9	No. of church planting centers	4	1	2	2

As indicated in the table, four of the local churches have two sub-pastoral committees. If they continue giving the training using the curriculum for the next three years, there is no doubt that all of them will become local churches. Therefore, in Nazareth town itself, there will be eight local churches in place. This will be true for Dire Dawa as well.

The number of cell groups in each local church is also something worth noting. Observing the table above, each local church has the following: Semen - 68, Misrak - 80, Debub - 64, and Mirab - 59 for a current total of 271 living cells.

Dire Dawa Meserete Kristos Local Church. Dire Dawa is another local church of Meserete Kristos Church which is located in the Eastern part of Ethiopia, 520 kilometers away from Addis Ababa. Dire Dawa was also originally started by Mennonite Mission.

Until 1982, it was one local church and the membership was not more than 200. In 1993, the Dire Dawa church introduced the pastoral care ministry and started with one pastoral care committee and with four sub-pastoral units. This means that the whole local church was organized in four groups based on their geographical locations in the town. Educational programs were then organized and given to different groups (home cell groups) of members using the curriculum. A year later, the four sub-pastoral units were promoted to local church level. To date, the four local churches have reorganized themselves by establishing pastoral care structure and subsequently experiencing spiritual, organic, numerical and outreach (mission) growth. The total membership of the four local churches as reported in August 1996 is Kezira - 703, Megalla - 584, Merab - 752 and Misrak - 635, for a total of 2670.¹¹

Church planting

One outstanding strength of MKC is planting new churches aggressively. Within the first 14 years it has grown from 14 local congregations to 172, and from three church-planting centers to 296 church-planting centers.

Historically, MKC worked only in the eastern part of the country. This demarcation was made by mission agencies some 35 years ago. Each mainline denomination had their own geographical boundaries of mission and church activities. Today, this boundary is overrun by the work of the Holy Spirit. As a result, MKC is everywhere in the country. (See Appendix 3).

Foltz and Henry remind their readers that the church exists for mission. To this effect, all church departments are to result in the furthering of the mission.¹²

Accordingly, MKC has a high priority on evangelism. The different activities like conferences (mini-crusades), outreaches (Great Commission Committees activities) and altar calls all contribute to church growth. Every Sunday, many respond, coming forward for prayer and further instructions. During these occasions, members, especially women, give the traditional crackling sound called “ililta” and cheer—an expression of joy and praise to the Lord when persons come forward to accept the Lord Jesus Christ. This momentous event demonstrates that the heart of the members of the church is set on “evangelizing the lost.”

Most of MKC's local churches and church-planting centers have their structures suited for reaching unreached peoples as well. For instance, the Jimma MKC local church, located in the southwest of the country, is reaching the Kaffa and Menja tribes. The Gambella MKC local church, located in the western part of the country, is reaching the tribes of Agnuwak and Gambella. The Dengebe local church, located, close to the Sudan border, is reaching the Shinasha tribe. The Kibremengist, a church-planting center of Shakiso local church, located in the southern part of the country, is reaching the Guji tribe. The presence of local churches and church-planting centers will sooner or later affect the people in the area.

Church-planting center Case Study - Bahir Dar. Bahir Dar is a regional government town located in the northwest of Ethiopia, 565 kilometers away from Addis Ababa. It has a population of 127,000. Church work started in 1988 with three members of MKC who went to this place because of government jobs.

MKC head office, through its evangelism and church planting department, started training programs for the three members together with five other members coming from the surrounding towns. Over six years there was continual growth in membership. As a result, Bahir Dar was considered as one of the MKC's church-planting centers. Due to the introduction of the pastoral care ministry, numerical, spiritual, and organic growth were observed. Furthermore, the center even went out to reach other neighboring towns and established other church-planting centers. In 1994, because there were enough people that could be leaders and the group was self-supporting, it was promoted to a local church status.

To date, Bahir Dar has 315 members, 17 church-planting centers, three evangelists and two One Year for Christ workers. In fact, the local church has one student studying for his first degree in one of the theological colleges in the country.¹³ Furthermore, in its pastoral care structure the local church has two sub-pastoral care committees and 70 home cell groups. This local church is now intensively using the training curriculum and is expecting to divide into two local churches probably within the next two years.

In Bahir Dar, there are three secular training institutions. A lot of work (mostly discipleship and follow up) is done to evangelize the students of these institutions. As a result, every year 10-15 Christian students graduate and are assigned to different places of the country. These graduates in turn become church planters. This is true for most Christian students, who graduate from other higher institutions in the country as well.

Church structure

Smith says that complex doctrines and structures may be useful for theological classification and church management, but they do little to move hearts towards conversion. He further says that unless the church relates all doctrines and structures to the goal of proclaiming the simple message of the gospel, these doctrines and structures will have little impact on people's lives.¹⁴

MKC leadership concurs. As a result, it has so far maintained structures that are

conducive to evangelism. Depending on the need, structures have been continually changed to suit both management and educational programs.

In MKC experience, a new structure was developed in 1992 to accommodate and manage the fast growing number of churches. This new structure brought decentralization of authority and activities to the regions, (See church organogram, Appendix 1).

The existing structure also shows that each region will have its own education committee. The main duty of this committee is to coordinate all educational programs of the region in collaboration with the education department of the MKC head office. Every time a new region is established, there will be a regional training center in place in order to facilitate the educational program.

The other structure that keeps the training program always in motion is the pastoral care structure, an integral part of a local church and church-planting center. It is always there to cater to the feeding or nurturing of members of the church. Beyond any shadow of doubt, a structure of this nature with people being motivated, involved, and operating in it is very important to any growing church.

Lay mobilization

Every believer has a part in Christ's ministry. In fact, Paul frequently associates "the ministry" with the work of all of God's people. He said, "We are putting no obstacle in anyone's way, so that no fault may be found with our ministry, but as servants of God we have commended ourselves in every way" (2 Cor. 6:3-4). To the Ephesians, Paul wrote: "to equip the saints for ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until all of us come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to maturity, to the measure of the full stature of Christ" (Eph .4:12-13).

Clearly there is a ministry to which Christ's body is called. Churches have to mobilize lay people into the ministry by recruiting, training, and assigning them to do the work in the areas of their gifts.

Kennedy warns that one of the greatest victories Satan has ever scored is the idea which he has foisted off on probably 90 percent of the Christian church that it is the task of full-time ministers, pastors, and evangelists only to share the gospel of Christ and that this is not the job of lay people. He adds that Satan has been so successful with this stratagem that it has been estimated that probably 95 percent of his own church members never lead anyone to Christ.¹⁵

According to the experience of MKC, there is a high level of lay mobilization in all local churches and church-planting centers. As much as possible members are assigned in home cell groups for discipleship programs and according to their gifts members are requested to serve within the structure. As a result, many members of MKC due to the solid leadership training they get through its educational system are serving not only MKC but also other evangelical churches. For instance, there are many members of MKC who are chosen to be leaders in various committees that deal with evangelical churches fellowships, para-church organizations and student fellowships. In most cases the members are lay leaders, not full-time workers.

Conclusion

Running a big country-wide educational program has not been carried out without problems, such as financial constraints and dropouts of trainees. Sometimes trainers from the head office and trainees as well are forced to take their annual leave to do the work. In some centers, trainees may not arrive on time due to transportation problems. Therefore, the training continues until midnight, putting pressure and inconvenience on both the trainers and the trainees themselves and to some extent affecting the learning-teaching process.

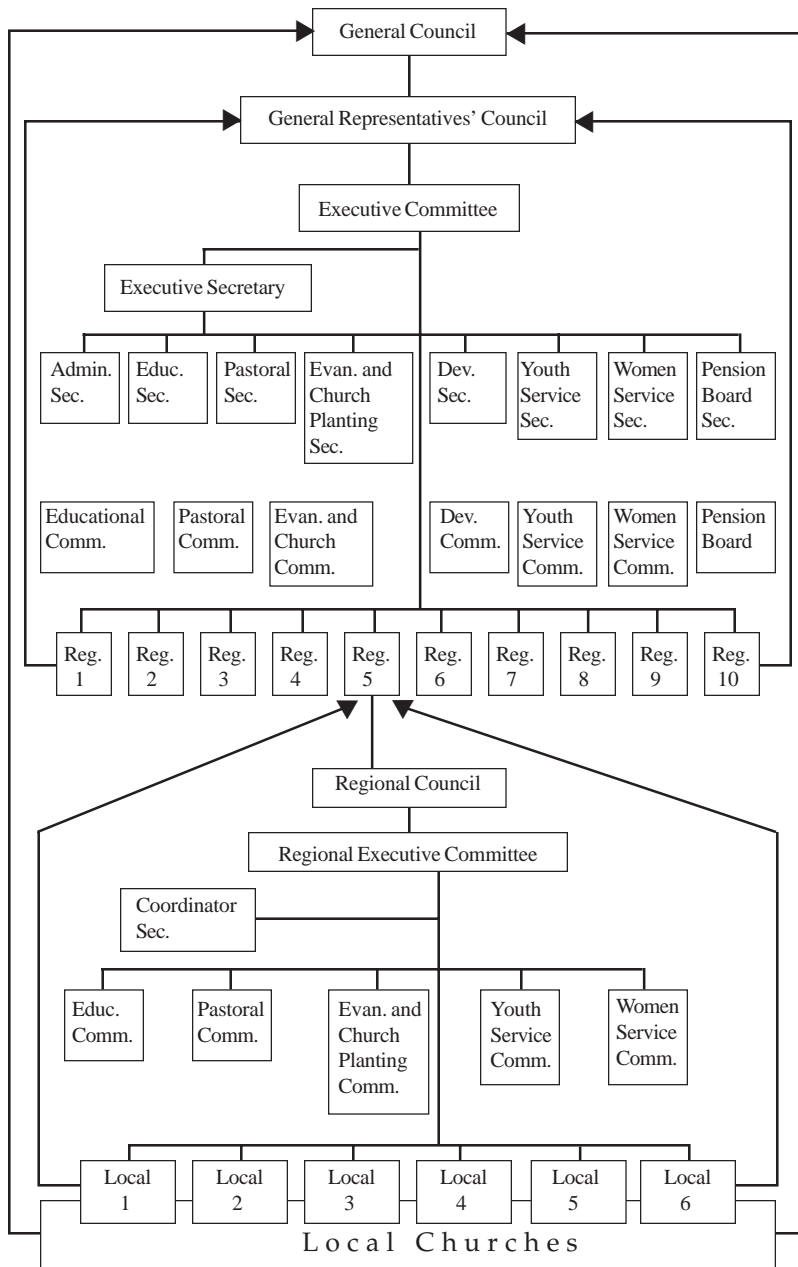
With the ever increasing number of churches and church-planting centers, administration in non-formal theological education must be constantly growing. It takes all the wisdom, skill, and Christlikeness one can bring to the task. To this end, the spearheading education committee members and the teachers' council of MKC are sacrificing their family time, social life, and convenience. This is also true to some extent of the trainers in the local churches and church-planting centers—a major weak point that should be addressed by the leadership.

Although the work demands sacrifice on all sides, the Meserete Kristos Church through its timely functioning non-formal theological education program has experienced a growing life of worship, fellowship, and evangelism among its members in almost all its constituencies. This is evidenced by the organic and annual numerical growth of the regional centers, local churches, church-planting centers and membership.

In order to accommodate such growth and expansion and to reflect the message of Jesus Christ, the administrative as well as the educational structures (the pastoral care structure) are continuously restructured. This exercise has enabled MKC to produce leaders and mobilize the laity in various disciplines of church ministries. Therefore, if MKC continues with this trend for the next five years it will reach many unreached areas of Ethiopia and will have mission work started elsewhere outside the country consequently fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19).

Appendix 1

MKC Organogram



Appendix 2**One Year for Christ — Training Courses**

S/No.	Subject/Title	Hours
1	MKC Church Doctrine	20
2	How to Preach/Methodology	20
3	Old Testament Survey	30
4	New Testament Survey	30
5	Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit	20
6	Master Life (discipleship)	20
7	Hermeneutics	30
8	Evangelism and Church Planting	20

Appendix 3

Meserete Kristos Church before 1982
(Nationalization)
Distribution of Local Churches
Map A

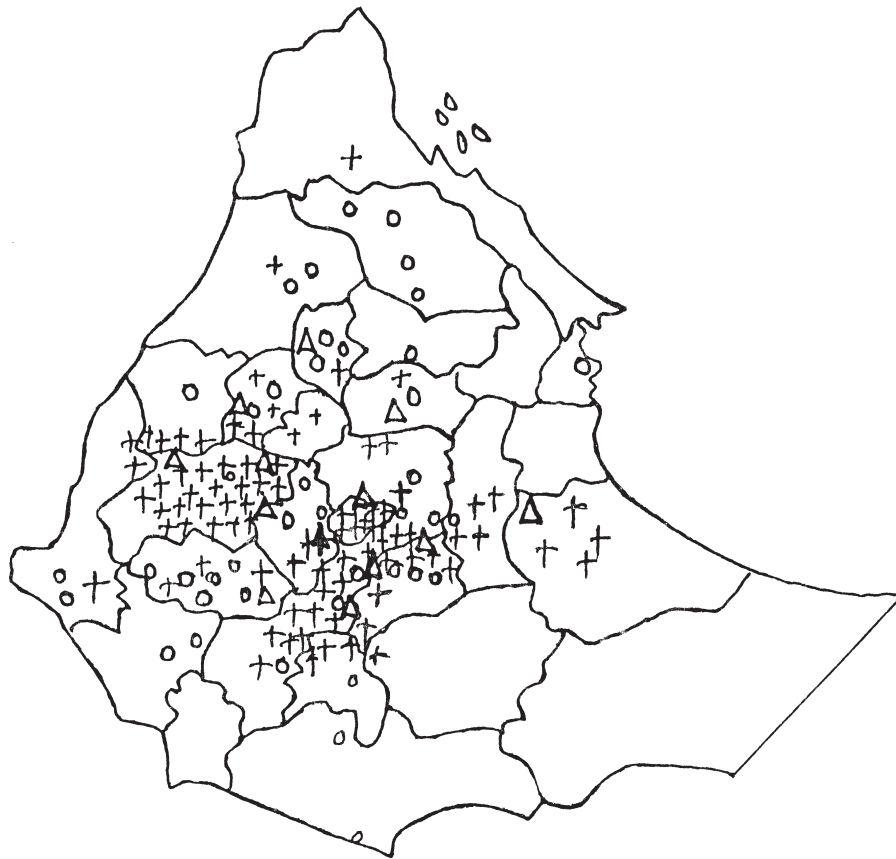


Key:

+	= Local churches	14
O	= Church planting centers	NIL
△	=	NIL

Appendix 4

**Meserete Kristos Church Today
(1996)
Distribution of Local Churches and
Church Planting Centers**



Key:

+	= Local churches	172
O	= Church planting centers	296
△	=	45

Appendix 5**MKC Non-formal Theological Training Curriculum****A. New Members**

1. Following Jesus (Chapters 1-3)
2. Water Baptism

B. Older Members

3. Following Jesus (Chapters 4-6)
4. Holy Communion
5. Forgiveness
6. Following Jesus (Chapters 7-8)
7. The church
8. Following Jesus (Chapters 9-10)
9. Spiritual Authority (Chapters 1-2)
10. MKC Statement of Faith
11. Book Study - Ephesians
12. Character study - Abraham
13. Stewardship (Finance)

C. Trainers/Leaders

14. Book Study - I Peter
15. Divine Guidance
16. Atonement
17. Spiritual Man
18. Spiritual Authority (Chapters 3 - 18)
19. The Holy Spirit
20. Bible Study methods
21. How to lead Bible study groups
22. Organizing Bible study groups
23. Preaching
24. New Testament survey
25. Old Testament survey
26. Sunday School/Methodology
27. Planning and Organizing

Endnotes

- ¹ Kraybill, N. Paul, ed., *Called to be Sent* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1964) p. 155.
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- ³ Gangel, O. Kenneth, *Building Leaders for Church Education* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1981) p. 31.
- ⁴ Regier, Fremont and Sara, *African Non-formal Theological Education Research Project* (ANTERP), (North Newton, Kansas, 1994) p. 20.
- ⁵ Tuttle G. Robert, *John Wesley, His Life and Theology* (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1978) pp. 135-137.
- ⁶ Kannadey, Peggy, ed., *Church Growth Magazine* (Autumn 1992) p. 13.
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- ⁸ Wagner, Arn Towns, ed., *Church Growth State of Art*, (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1989) p. 114.
- ⁹ Kraybill, p. 114.
- ¹⁰ MKC Head Office, *MKC Constitution, Part II*, Article 5 number 2, p. 19.
- ¹¹ Nazareth Regional Center (MKC) *Annual Report* (August 1996).
- ¹² Foltz, L. Howard & Henry Mark. *Triumph Missions Renewal for the Local Church*, (Joplin: Messenger Publishing House, 1994) p. 108.
- ¹³ Bahir Dar MKC Local Church, *Annual Report* (August 1996).
- ¹⁴ Smith, C. Glenn, ed., *Evangelizing Adults* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1985) p. 67.
- ¹⁵ Smith, C. Glenn, pp. 37-40.

